

# Reviewing the Issue of Managing and Sharing Organisation's Knowledge

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**Abstract:** *Knowledge sharing is essential in the implementation of any knowledge management initiatives. The real sharing required is between the employees and their co-workers. The success depends on individuals' willingness to encourage and share their organisational knowledge through internal organisational social exchanges. The process requires the element of reciprocal arrangement and trust. It requires intra-team trust and intra-team relational bonds, leadership and also intercultural training that foster regular and frequent mutual cross-cultural exchange of ideas. The advantage of knowledge management initiatives can be realised by empowering the members of the organisation. The main aim of this article is to generally discuss and assess the issue of managing and sharing organisation's knowledge by underlining the challenges. In reality if members of the organisation believe that the knowledge contributed is a strategic resource then it will create the appropriate conditions for the situation to happen. Or else, no matter how adequate the organisational structure design may be, members of the organisation will not be motivated to transfer and share the organisation's knowledge.*

**Keywords:** *Knowledge Sharing, Managing Knowledge, Organisational Knowledge, Knowledge Management*

## **PREAMBLE**

Drastic changes in the global economic eras have significantly changed the world economic perspectives. The advent of the information and communication technology (ICT) and the information revolution totally changed the way information is being processed, managed and dealt with. In the present knowledge era, the main attention and attraction is on the knowledge that would make customers, clientele or patrons feel good, satisfied and contented all the times. These changes transformed the way organisations behave and react. The situation demands for optimum treatment of innovation and creativity in organisational operations. Drucker (2001) proclaimed land, labour and capital are no longer valuable in comparison to knowledge. Organisations need to emphasise on adding

competitive value to their products and services. This is only achievable through the application of direct human expertise that is our knowledge.

Ohmae (2005) expressed that the global economy has its own dynamic and logic. The key emphasis, its success and survival is on learning. Cong and Pandya (2003) also affirmed the new economy not only possess challenges, but also offers opportunities for the public sectors to take active initiatives to adopt new management tools, techniques and philosophies of the private sector - not so much about product competitive advantages, or return of investment, but more incline towards policy decisions and delivery of services, but it is about information provision and knowledge indication, sharing and utilisation. Knowledge and intellectual capital determine competitiveness and play key roles in fostering a culture that promote information and knowledge sharing in organisation.

Organisations are basically made up of merely people. Its businesses, systems and processes are run by people and managed by people. It is the fundamental belief and thinking of employees that their job is very important, and they are performing the task very well. People are the essence and basic foundation of an organisation as well as the basic unit of change. Employment security is fundamental to organisational performance and prerequisite to the successful implementation of virtually all management practices. Employee support, cooperation and innovation cannot be sustained if employees believe that they are being viewed as expendable. Therefore, organisations should strive to create an environment in which employment security is assured and employees have the stability necessary to actively and enthusiastically work to achieve organisation's goals.

## **MANAGING AND SHARING ORGANISATION'S KNOWLEDGE**

The biggest issue in managing knowledge is culture - the culture of sharing the knowledge and using it instinctively. The culture of knowledge sharing is crucial in the implementation and execution of a knowledge-based economy. It is an interactive process to ensure the right information made available to the right people at the right time, not only to enrich their knowledge based but also to allow them to react judiciously. To survive and remain competitive, the people and the organisations must constantly renew, replenish, expand, create and re-create more knowledge and share them effectively. Knowledge is perishable, and nobody can really hoard it. Knowledge sharing is a dynamic process, and the sharing of practices within organisation is key to the sustainability of a knowledge management initiative.

Knowledge management is about cultural change. The focus should be on behavioural changes towards creating a working environment where knowledge is seen as a common good and where employees are encouraged to contribute to knowledge activities as part of their core responsibilities. Employee interactions can stimulate and enhance creativity and foster learning. Interactions between individuals are essential in innovation process. Dialogue between individuals or groups can be the basis for the creation of new ideas. Interaction between employees can be seen as having the potential for creating knowledge. Therefore, the issues are about maximising the ability of the people to create new knowledge and how to build environment conducive to for the sharing of knowledge. It is about maximising knowledge created by people and how to create innovation to enhance the environment.

Eisenberg (1997) and Wah (1999) claimed that the foundation for any knowledge management initiatives is people. People create knowledge, new ideas, new products, and establish relationships that make processes work. Fernandez, Gonzalez and Sabherwal (2004) opined considerable amount of knowledge is stored in people within organisations - embedded in the minds of its personnel, within individuals and groups as a result of series of interactions and relationships among them. According to Ndlela and Toit (2001) in order for employees to be knowledgeable, they must be allowed to experiment and learn from mistakes and be encouraged to share the lessons learned. That is why Brand (1998) proposed motivating the people to access and share information that will later be converted to become knowledge.

According to Abell and Oxbrow (2001) knowledge sharing requires changes in corporate culture. From 'information is power' to 'knowledge sharing builds power'. Knowledge sharing behaviours have to be encouraged. Connelly and Kelloway (2002) denoted knowledge sharing as a positive force in creating innovative organisation, especially through the element of reciprocity. Md. Zabid, Murali and Azmawani (2004) indicated the high sociability opportunities in organisation suggests that it has high commitment and therefore ensures overall organisational sharing success. Lin and Lee (2006) identified social issues as factors that affect knowledge sharing. Syed Mustapha and Sayed (2005) opined social communication plays a base role and an important factor towards the process of capturing the knowledge.

Oliver and Kandadi (2006) stressed organisational culture plays a key role in developing knowledge culture. According to Christensen (2007) knowledge sharing is the process of exploiting existing knowledge, about identifying existing and accessible knowledge. Chen and Huang (2007) suggested innovative and cooperative climate is positively related to social interaction and is effective for knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing requires changes in the organisations' corporate culture. For the knowledge sharing to be effective it requires organisation to identify and create a caring community with a strong common interest, topic or destination to achieve. Holsapple and Joshi (2001) and Reid (2003) expressed their total agreement to the concept of knowledge sharing culture and considered it as the key element to effective knowledge management initiative.

One of the difficulties in getting people to share knowledge emanates from the nature of knowledge itself. Knowledge is personal, mobile, and portable, and knows no boundaries. This has made knowledge sharing potentially dangerous, in that a good idea can be easily copied once it has been shared. Knowledge sharing is an unnatural act in most organisations. The practice of storytelling, for example is very useful in preserving the organisational memory, and can be used to convey values, build esprit de corps, create role models, reveal how things works around the organisation, and communicate complex ideas. Participations in communities of practice, which are informal, ad hoc, spontaneous groups of people who voluntarily share similar interests and goals is another avenue for knowledge sharing. It enables organisation to tap into knowledge that is generated and held collectively.

McDermott and O'Dell (2001) strongly promoted that the process involves balancing the

visible and invisible dimensions of practices in organisations' processes. However, Chua (2003) reiterated, knowledge sharing does not occur in vacuum but is engendered through reciprocal relationships among members of the organisation. According to Lin and Lee (2005) it is a known fact that knowledge sharing has an essential influence on the success of any knowledge management initiatives. It is apparent that the existence of knowledge sharing practices is a must to ensure the success of any knowledge management initiative. The plan will and can never be successful without the full cooperation and comprehension of the employees.

## **UNDERSTANDING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING**

The study by Connelly and Kelloway (2003) on identifying predictors of employees' perceptions of knowledge sharing cultures positively indicated that perceptions about management's support for knowledge sharing and perceived positive social interaction culture were significant predictors of positive knowledge sharing culture. Employees were more inclined to react in accordance with management direction. This view is sustained by Bartol and Srivastava (2002), the being of knowledge sharing is when individuals in the organisation share organisationally relevant information, ideas, suggestions, and expertise with one another. The knowledge shared could be explicit as well as tacit. Sharing knowledge, whether explicit or tacit, requires effort on the part of the individual doing the sharing and the knowledge sharing mechanisms are not mutually exclusive. After all, sharing one's knowledge is very subjective and abstract in nature. The subject matter of knowledge management is not about claiming power and supremacy to dictate any state of understanding, learning, wisdom or self realisation.

Knowledge management is another management tool and concept to optimally manage the processes and intellectual resources in organisation. That is why Hill and Jones (2001) described the issues as related to the organisational values, such as, the beliefs and ideas about the kinds of goals and achievement that members of the organisation should and want to pursue. While Oliver and Kandadi (2006) proposed that organisational culture plays a key role in developing a knowledge culture. Tsui, et al. (2006) stressed effective knowledge sharing requires identifying a community that cares about a topic and enhancing their ability to think together, stay in touch, share ideas, generate new knowledge, and connect with other communities.

According to Verespej (1999) the real advantage of any knowledge management initiatives can only be realised by truly empowering the employees. Bowen and Lawler (1992) claimed that empowered individuals will result in employees taking extra responsibilities to solve organisational problems. Anahotu (1998) stressed learning new job skills will eventually lead to more competent employees. Chong (2006) emphasised good leadership provides proper environment for workers to stimulate and motivate, create, organise and share knowledge. Through this, best practices can be identified and better enterprise-wide problem solving methods can also be established.

## **ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

The implementation of any knowledge management initiative in any organisation is about

making the most out of the abilities of the people, especially in the creation of new knowledge and building favourable environment for organisational knowledge sharing. The condition necessitates the obligation to deal with people and their interior feelings by encouraging knowledge supportive practices. Strategic measures needed to attract and retain knowledgeable members of the organisation to part-take and increase the supply of well-informed, conversant and skilful human capital. These situations engendered through reciprocal relationships and interpersonal trust among the organisation members, stimulate employees' intentions, behaviours and skills to share organisations' knowledge. The issue of managing and sharing organisation's knowledge requires appropriate resolution to the various challenges as discussed below.

### *Communication Channels*

Knowledge sharing in its broadest sense, refers to the communication of all types of knowledge, which includes explicit knowledge or information, the know-how and know-who which are types of knowledge that can be documented and captured as information, and tacit knowledge in the form of skills and competencies. Tacit knowledge is personal and can only be shared through socialisation, interaction, and training. It requires face-to-face communication and in most cases it gets transferred through observation, imitation, practice, and interaction with the environment. Effective sharing involves the actions of transmission and absorption by the sender and potential receiver respectively. The critical outcome of knowledge sharing is the creation of new knowledge and innovation that will significantly improve organisational performance.

Creating and sustaining corporate values is a crucial requirement for effective knowledge management. Nayir and Uzuncarsili (2008) in their examination on a leading Turkish copper company, Sarkuysan related the company's success with its knowledge sharing culture. Managers in Sarkuysan used the storytelling tool very effectively to teach management values, generate principles and beliefs, and encourage behavioural and attitudinal mind-shifts. The company combined the core values of storytelling, continuity, loyalty and trust with the supports of top management and their reward system to achieve an unusual level of success in its knowledge management processes. The effective knowledge management practices combined with its unique corporate culture enabled it to cope with the changes and challenges faced.

According to Werr and Stjernberg (2003) the experiences of colleagues can also be an important source of knowledge. These exchanges of experiences, most of the times take place in informal and spontaneous situations or meetings. These experiences, mainly tacit will be shared among colleagues as stories, and later transformed into articulate knowledge through the process of sharing. In order to utilise the knowledge assets and obtain the maximum value, knowledge needs to be smoothly transferred and exchanged throughout the organisations. In an organisation with a knowledge sharing culture, people share ideas and insights because they see it as natural, not because they are forced to do so. The only blockage and obstruction to this is, as the knowledge owner is considered to be in posses of power, disclosing it might erode the power of the individual. The fear of losing superiority and the perception of not being adequately rewarded for the knowledge shared is a major stumbling block.

### *Technology and Knowledge Infrastructure*

The key elements that should be emphasised in any knowledge management initiatives are the culture, the values and beliefs about the organisational information and knowledge; the behaviour and work processes involved in the usage of these information and knowledge; the state of affairs, the pitfalls, the barriers and the drawbacks that might interfere with the practice of sharing these information and knowledge; and also the technology, involving the information systems, the infrastructures and info-structures available to support and facilitate the knowledge sharing practices. The implementation requires a balance combination between the data and information processing capabilities of the IT, and also the appropriate environment that would encourage creative and innovative capabilities among knowledge sharing stakeholders.

However, as Norhayati, Amelinckx and Wilemon (2004) emphasised, creating a knowledge-based environment requires more than technological advancement. It requires other crucial elements, such as intra-team trust and intra-team relational bonds, leadership, intercultural training that foster a collaborative interactive permissive space where members are actively encouraged to engage in a regular and frequent reciprocal cross-cultural exchange of ideas and in the creation of new solution. It is imperative to acknowledge that technology is simply a tool that needs human operations. No matter how sophisticated the technology can be, the implementation of technology has the potential to fail if insufficient considerations are given from the user perspectives.

### *Accepting the Benefits of Knowledge Sharing*

In realising a knowledge sharing culture, organisation members need to be convinced about the benefits that it would bring about to the organisation. Failing to make employees understand the benefit of sharing their strategic knowledge will result in hesitance to partake in any further knowledge sharing practices. According to Cheng (2002) in organisation where leaders play important and leading role to communicate and convince employees of the benefits and how knowledge sharing helps resulted in the delivery of better jobs or even helps them in their personal development as well as career progression. Basically, it enables employees to appreciate and understand the basics of knowledge sharing practices.

For a knowledge management initiative to be successful, it must begin from the top. Nonetheless, as knowledge is an abstract concept, the culture for knowledge sharing is very much dependent on the attitudes of the people who formed the culture. The main challenge to introducing new concept is in changing the existing culture to accept the new values. In order to successfully establish an environment for knowledge sharing, organisations need to undergo a process of cultural change and socialisation, which require change management. Again, opinion leaders are required to play vital roles in influencing employees to change the old attitudes, and adopt the new knowledge sharing values.

### *Sharing Motivation*

Monetary rewards is important, but not a significant motivating factor. Al-Alawi, Al-Marzooqi and Yasmeen (2007) examination, indicated there is a positive relationship between the existence of a reward systems aligned with sharing and knowledge sharing in organisations. Employees tend to perceive rewards as measures for behaviours preferred and appreciated by top management. Also, Yao, Kam and Chan (2007) in appraising the cause for lag of public sector's initiatives in the deployment of knowledge sharing, contributed it to among others the knowledge gap or lack of motivation due to the absence of an appropriate reward schemes to employee. Studies also provided evidences that knowledge sharing increases with the existence of reward systems aligned with knowledge sharing.

With regards to mechanisms for sharing knowledge in organisations, Bartol and Srivastava (2002) indicated sharing knowledge in formal interactions within or across teams or work units as one of the vital mechanism. Besides that, the other mechanism are contribution of knowledge to organisational databases, sharing knowledge in informal interactions among individuals, and sharing knowledge within communities of practice, the voluntary forums of employees around a topic of interest. Chong (2003) identified the gaps between the perceived importance in the implementations of knowledge management initiatives, and listed team working and empowerment as among the critical factor in terms of the degree of importance to organisational performance and knowledge management success.

A study on Jordanian universities, Alhammad, et al. (2009) discovered that the academicians were less motivated compared to the administrative staff in terms of knowledge sharing. The study concluded the reasons for the lack of interest in knowledge sharing were due to fewer mutual relationships, team working opportunities, intentions and motivations among the academic staff. The study also revealed that there were no differences between genders in terms of knowledge sharing. Motivating knowledge sharing can be accomplished through supervisory control, as a formal way of encouraging knowledge sharing, the Top-Down approach. However, the success will depend on individuals' willingness to share. The result would be better and more effective by encouraging sharing through internal organisational social exchanges. This way people will contribute to others commensurate with the contributions perceived made by the others. Then again, it requires the element of reciprocal arrangement. The exchange relationship develops from series of mutual exchanges and over time will become a normative behaviour. Additionally, through perceived organisational support, a reciprocal view of the relationship between employee and employer will exist. Finally, through the effects of supervisory control and organisational support, the motivational elements will not be based merely on economic assumptions, but also vast array of influences in organisation that impact the decision making processes of individuals.

Chay, et al. (2004) suggested that in order for effective knowledge sharing to take place in knowledge-intensive and knowledge-generating organisations, an environment conducive to the development of social capital is vital. Particular emphasis needs to be put on organisational climate variables, such as recognition and rewards. Besides that, open-mindedness is another predictor of knowledge sharing and these voluntary interactions between human actors aimed at exchanging information and experiences often occur when people are comfortable with each other, due to social similarities.

Manetje and Martins (2009), in an empirical study focused on the relationship between organisational commitment and organisational culture indicated that members of the organisation are more affectively committed to the organisation when the existing achievement and role cultures are perceived to be dominant. The study in general concluded that employees who are affectively committed to the organisation are more willing to maintain their relationship with the organisation than those who are normatively and continuance committed. It is suggested that organisations should create an organisational culture that ensures the development of affective commitment. If the organisations fail to do so, it will affect the overall organisational commitment.

Cabrera and Cabrera (2002) elaborated on the issue of cooperation and dilemma in sharing personal insights with co-workers clearly suggested the exchange of information among individuals and groups within the organisation is a requisite for the creation of collective knowledge, and collective knowledge is an important source of competitive advantage. Therefore, fostering a rich flow of knowledge exchange within the organisation is an important source of competitive advantage. Clearly technology is only one of the ingredients for successful knowledge exchange. The other, even more important requisite is that of a social environment which encourages or even enforces knowledge sharing. While the value of sharing knowledge is obvious to organisations, from an individual standpoint, sharing knowledge can carry significant costs which can even offset the potential benefits.

#### *Trust*

Trust is a major factor in allowing the knowledge sharing culture to bloom and flourish in organisation. Trust should not be limited to among and between peers, but should also be entrusted to trust towards management. Pai (2006) indicated there is a positive relationship between trusts among stakeholders with knowledge sharing behaviour. Knowledge management is about sharing and encouraging creativity and innovations among members of the organisation. The fundamental element of knowledge-sharing requires trust. The trust not just between employee and employee in organisation, but also between employees and management, and also between employees and the tools and technologies adopted. Castelfranchi (2004) established that trust ingredients are necessary to be present and required while passing or accepting knowledge. Knowledge sharing is a physiological process in any organisation and teamwork and supported by a plurality of individual and social motives and values, that presupposes some form of trust among the agents and between the agent and the group / organisation.

There is a significant relationship between environment and infrastructure and knowledge sharing practices. Lin (2007) viewed that employees who believe in their ability to share organisationally useful knowledge tend to have stronger motivation to share knowledge with their colleagues. In the analyses of the relationship between knowledge sharing behaviours and performance, the study of Marques, Cardoso and Zappalá (2008) inferred that people with more sharing behaviours are expected to have higher individual performance scores. There is a positive association between these behaviours and individual performance. People who have better performance are expected to have more behaviours of knowledge sharing.

Claver-Cortes, Zaragoza-Sa'ez and Pertusa-Ortega (2007) in their analyses indicated, in order to facilitate knowledge creation and transmission within the organisation, the top management must show an open mentality in matters of knowledge. To enable this, organisational structure features must be supported by a set of objectives oriented toward the generation of knowledge as a strategic resource. Apart from that the respondents also in their responses indicated that their top management also provided adequate policies and guidelines to support the implementation of their knowledge sharing practices.

It is important for organisations to adopt a culture that encourages these values. Creating an environment where sharing knowledge is rewarded and the human element is treated as a vital factor. Otherwise, no matter how adequate the organisational structure design might be, employees may not feel motivated to transfer the knowledge acquired, especially if they come to the conclusion that it can be damaging rather than beneficial to them. According to de Jong and Hartog (2007) leaders trying to enhance individual innovation among their employees could attempt to consult them more often, ensure that employees have sufficient autonomy in deciding how to go about their task, and support and recognise people's initiatives and innovative efforts. Creating a positive and safe atmosphere that encourages openness and risk taking seems to encourage idea generation and application. Possibilities for idea generation and opportunity exploration seem to be enhanced by directly stimulating and probing employees to generate ideas (intellectual stimulation), supporting open and transparent communication processes, creating avenues for knowledge sharing and diffusion, and assigning challenging tasks to employees.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

It is difficult and almost impossible to claim authority over the right to manage knowledge. However, the subject matter of knowledge management is not about claiming power and supremacy to dictate any state of understanding, learning, wisdom or self realisation. Knowledge management is just another management tool and concept to optimally manage the processes and intellectual resources in organisations. The tacit knowledge is personal and can only be shared through socialisation, interaction, and training. It requires face-to-face communication and in most cases it gets transferred through observation, imitation, practice, and interaction with the environment. Effective sharing involves the actions of transmission and absorption by the sender and potential receiver respectively. The critical outcome of knowledge sharing is the creation of new knowledge and innovation that will significantly improve organisational performance.

The foundation for any knowledge management initiatives is people. People create knowledge, new ideas, new products, and establish relationships that make processes work. Therefore, the real advantage of any knowledge management initiatives can only be realised by truly empowering the employees. Knowledge is an abstract concept and the culture for knowledge sharing is very much dependent on the attitudes of the people who formed the culture. Failing to make employees understand the benefit of sharing their strategic knowledge will result in hesitance to partake in any further knowledge sharing practices. The main challenge to introducing new concept is in changing the existing culture to accept the new values. In order to successfully establish an environment for knowledge sharing, organisations need to undergo a process of cultural change and socialisation, which

require change management. Leadership in organisations must play important and leading role to communicate and convince employees of the benefits and how knowledge sharing helps to deliver their jobs better or even helps them in their personal development as well as career progression.

The real success will depend and impact on individuals' willingness to share. So, the result would be better and more effective to encourage the sharing through internal organisational social exchanges. This way the people will contribute to others commensurate with the contributions perceived made by the others. Then again, it requires the element of reciprocal arrangement. The exchange relationship develops from series of mutual exchanges and over time will become a normative behaviour. In order to facilitate knowledge creation and transmission within the organisation, the top management must show an open mentality in matters of knowledge. To enable this, organisational structure features must be supported by a set of objectives oriented toward the generation of knowledge as a strategic resource. Monetary rewards is important, but not a significant motivating factor. Trust is a major factor in allowing the knowledge sharing culture to bloom and flourish in organisation. The fundamental element of knowledge-sharing requires trust. The trust not just between employee and employee in organisation, but also between employees and management, and also between employees and the tools and technologies adopted.

Creating a knowledge-based environment requires more than technological advancement. It requires other crucial elements such as intra-team trust and intra-team relational bonds, leadership, intercultural training that foster a collaborative interactive permissive space where members are actively encouraged to engage in a regular and frequent reciprocal cross-cultural exchange of ideas and in the creation of new solution. It is imperative to acknowledge that technology is simply a tool that needs human operations. The experiences of organisational members can be an important source of knowledge. These exchanges of experiences, most of the times take place in informal and spontaneous situations or meetings. These experiences mainly tacit will then be shared among colleagues as stories, and later transformed into articulate knowledge through the process of sharing. In order to utilise the knowledge assets and obtain the maximum value, knowledge need to be smoothly transferred and exchanged throughout the organisations.

In an organisation with a knowledge sharing culture, people share ideas and insights because they see it as natural, not because they are forced to do so. The fact is that, only if members of the organisation believe that the knowledge contributed can become a strategic resource then only will they try to create the appropriate conditions for this situation to happen. Creating an environment where sharing knowledge is rewarded and the human element is treated as a vital factor. Otherwise, no matter how adequate the organisational structure design might be, employees may not feel motivated to transfer the knowledge acquired, especially if they come to the conclusion that it can be damaging rather than beneficial to them. Notwithstanding the apprehension, the key question remains the same. What are the possible driving forces capable of inspiring members of the organisation to embrace the culture of knowledge sharing.

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